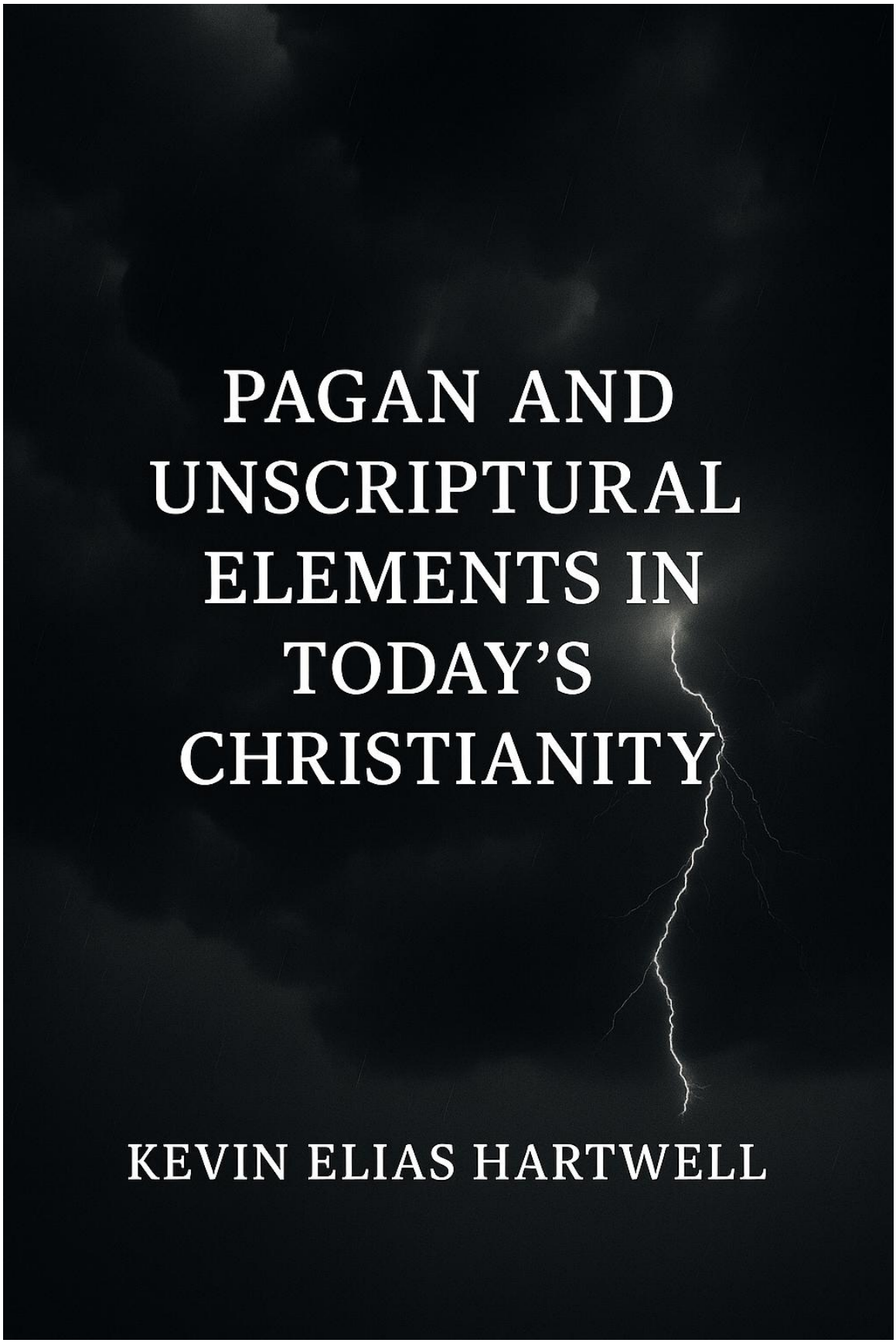
PAGAN AND UNSCRIPTURAL ELEMENTS IN TODAY'S CHRISTIANITY
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Preface

This writing is a call to face reality. **For two thousand years, believers in Christ have possessed the very Scriptures that reveal God's purpose, yet have built around them systems, traditions, and practices that often contradict the very truth those Scriptures reveal. The result is a post-apostolic Christianity—a form of religion that bears little resemblance to the faith taught by Christ and His apostles. What began in the power of the Holy Spirit has become encrusted with ritual, hierarchy, and human invention—far removed from the divine pattern revealed in the New Testament.**

The purpose of this work is to expose what contradicts the apostolic revelation and to measure all things by the Word of God. The early believers met in homes, functioned as members of one Body, and lived under the direct headship of Christ. Today much of what bears His name no longer bears His likeness. The outward forms remain, but the inward reality has largely vanished.

This is not the hour for comfort but for confrontation—not the defense of tradition, but the recovery of truth. The Lord is calling His people to abandon the systems of men and return to the simplicity and authority of His Word. The issue is not innovation but restoration—that Christ may again have on earth what He purposed from the beginning: a people who live as His Body, expressed in local churches, bearing His testimony in purity and power.

Introduction — The Need for Reexamination

Nearly every practice in modern Christianity is accepted without question simply because it has been handed down through centuries of tradition. Yet few have paused to ask whether these things were ever ordained by Christ or practiced by His apostles. The New Testament reveals a church born in purity and power—organic, spiritual, and wholly governed by the Holy Spirit. In contrast, what developed in the centuries following the apostles was a system encrusted and entombed in pagan forms and human structures, until the living organism became a religious corpse.

The Lord Jesus called the religious leaders of His day "whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." Paul used similar language when confronting those who boasted in law yet broke it. This is the condition of religion when the Spirit's life has departed—polished on the outside, decayed within. The divisions, hierarchies, and hollow traditions of what is called Christianity only prove the same disease endures: the corpse is carefully adorned, but it remains a corpse.

Because today's Christians care little for Christ Himself, His Word, the one Body, and the pattern of the apostolic local churches, the result is unspeakable loss. Oh, the horror—the stench—the absence of oneness, life, love, and light! What was meant to be a living expression of Christ on earth has become a divided and powerless system, beautiful in appearance but void within. The lampstands have dimmed, and the fragrance of Christ has been replaced by the odor of death.

Yet even amid this desolation, the Lord has not changed His purpose, nor withdrawn His call. His desire remains what it was in the beginning—that His people would be a living testimony of Himself, joined together as one Body under His headship, meeting in simplicity, and bearing the light of His presence in every city and place. The ruins of Christendom do not cancel the revelation of Christ. Therefore, what follows is not written to condemn, but to recover—to strip away what man has added and to restore what God has ordained. Let every reader approach these matters not in defensiveness, but in devotion, for the Spirit still speaks to those who have ears to hear what He says to the churches.

We are not opposed to the traditions of the apostles, for these were born of revelation and preserved in Scripture. Our concern is with the traditions of men—those accumulated customs and systems that, as the Lord said, "make void the word of God" (Mark 7:13). The apostolic tradition exalts Christ and depends upon the Spirit; human tradition exalts form and depends upon the flesh. The one builds the living church; the other builds religion.

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1. The Church Building — From Homes to Basilicas

In the first century, believers never built or purchased special structures for worship. The church was the people — a living temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21–22). Their gatherings were simple and spontaneous, held in homes (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2). There were no sanctuaries, pulpits, or pews — only the living presence of Christ among His members. The Lord Himself declared, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

In the early fourth century, following Constantine's alleged conversion, Christianity was legalized and soon favored by the Roman state. With imperial patronage came wealth, social prestige, and architecture. The Roman basilica, a civic hall once used for imperial ceremonies and judicial proceedings, was adopted as the pattern for Christian meeting places.

- **The apse**, where the magistrate sat in judgment, became the chancel or altar area.
- **The nave**, where the citizens assembled, became the congregational hall.
- **A central altar and elevated clergy created a visible barrier between "holy men" and ordinary believers**, dividing sacred from secular.

This architectural transformation was drawn more from pagan and imperial forms than from apostolic simplicity. The basilica's grandeur reflected the throne rooms of emperors and the temples of false gods. What had once been the living fellowship of the saints became a religious performance framed by stone and ceremony — majestic to the eye, but foreign to the Spirit of Christ.

The consequences were immense:

- **From living temple to sacred space**: The focus shifted from the believers themselves as God's dwelling to the building as "God's house."
- **From mutual participation to clerical performance**: Once a stage, altar, and hierarchy appeared, the Body's functioning was silenced, and the saints became spectators.
- **From simplicity to ritual**: Liturgies evolved to match the architecture's splendor, replacing the Spirit-led gatherings described in 1 Corinthians 14:26.

The Misnomer of the Church Building — Confusing Structure with Spirit

The true house of God is not made of wood, stone, or steel. It is composed of those who have been born of the Spirit and joined to Christ as living members of His Body. Yet through centuries of religious tradition, a tragic confusion has taken root: buildings are called "churches," and gatherings in those buildings are described as being "in the house of the Lord." But no material structure, however grand, can ever contain or represent the dwelling place of the living God.

Paul declared, "You are God's building… you are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you" (1 Cor. 3:9, 16). The apostles never invited people to come to church; they proclaimed the gospel so that men and women might be added to the Lord (Acts 5:14). The early believers met wherever they could — in homes, courtyards, upper rooms — yet they knew that they themselves were the house of God.

When pastors and congregations refer to their sanctuaries as "the house of the Lord," it reveals how far we have drifted from the apostolic revelation. To say, "It's good to be in the house of God," while surrounded by people whose spiritual state is unknown, is to mistake physical proximity for spiritual reality. The true house of God consists only of those in whom Christ dwells.

This is the great mixture of today's Christianity — the outward form replacing the inward life, the visible structure obscuring the invisible reality. A building may serve as a practical place for fellowship and ministry, but the church is not a place to which we go; it is a people among whom God lives. Until this is recovered, the divine testimony remains clouded by human misunderstanding.

2. The Service — From Mutual Participation to Clergy-Led Performance

In the apostolic age, the gatherings of believers were marked by mutual participation under the living direction of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul gives a vivid glimpse of this order in 1 Corinthians 14:26: "When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." Here, every believer could contribute — through song, teaching, prayer, or testimony — as the Spirit supplied. Elders and apostles guided, but they did not monopolize. The focus was corporate edification, not performance; the church was a living Body, with every member functioning in measure (Rom. 12:4-6; Eph. 4:15-16).

As the centuries passed, spontaneity gave way to structure. By the second and third centuries, the gatherings became increasingly formalized, and professional clergy began to dominate the meetings. By the fourth century — with imperial favor, basilicas, and official recognition — the liturgy was fixed and hierarchical:

• **Set prayers, scripted readings, and ritual responses** replaced the free functioning of the members.

• **A single presiding bishop or priest became the center of attention**, directing all proceedings.
• **The congregation was reduced to a passive audience**, standing, sitting, and responding by rote — but seldom speaking, praying, or prophesying.

In place of the Spirit's liberty came the pageantry of empire. Processions, vestments, incense, choirs, and chanting — drawn from Greco-Roman civic ceremony and pagan temple worship — gave the "service" an air of spectacle. The assembly of the saints became a performance to be observed rather than a fellowship to be shared.

The consequences were severe and enduring:

• **The Body was silenced**: The living members of Christ were muted, no longer free to function in the Spirit's flow.
• **The clergy/laity divide deepened**: Ministry became the domain of the few while the many became spectators.
• **The Spirit's movement was restricted**: Fixed liturgies and human control left little room for divine direction or prophetic utterance.

A service centered upon one or two human leaders cannot fully manifest the life of the Body of Christ. The New Testament portrays gatherings where Christ Himself presided — directing the meeting through many members, each supplying His life for mutual building up. The recovery of this pattern is not a return to chaos but a return to spiritual order — the order of life, where the Head governs through His Body and the whole church participates in the living ministry of Christ.

3. The Sermon — From Many Speaking Christ to a Single Weekly Monologue

The gatherings of the early church did not revolve around a single man delivering a prepared weekly message. Rather, they were living meetings in which many spoke Christ, each one supplying from the Spirit for the building up of all. Paul paints this picture in 1 Corinthians 14:29–31: "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." Here, to prophesy does not mean foretelling future events, but speaking forth Christ — declaring His riches, life, and truth for the edification of the Body. The meeting was not a monologue but a living exchange in which the Head ministered His life through many members.

As the second and third centuries unfolded, this dynamic expression of Christ was gradually replaced by a single, formal discourse. By the time of the post-apostolic Fathers — such as Justin Martyr in the mid–second century — the sermon had become the centerpiece of the Sunday gathering:
• **The homily became the primary event**.
• **The bishop or presbyter became the exclusive voice of instruction**.
• **The congregation ceased to function as a body and became an audience**, listening in

silence to one man's interpretation of Scripture. Learning shifted from interactive fellowship to a lecture model, and the atmosphere of spiritual participation gave way to religious performance.

This transformation was heavily shaped by the classical rhetorical tradition of the Greco-Roman world. Trained in oratory, bishops adopted the polished style of public speakers — complete with formal openings, structured arguments, and eloquent conclusions. While this lent sophistication and philosophical appeal, it imported human art into divine service. The meeting of the saints became a stage for speechcraft rather than a fellowship in the Spirit.

The consequences of this change were subtle but devastating:

• **The many were silenced**: The rich, diverse supply of Christ from the Body was replaced by the ministry of one voice.
• **Passivity deepened**: Believers came to "hear a sermon" rather than to minister life to one another.
• **Spectator Christianity emerged**: The gathering was no longer the functioning of the Body but the attendance of an audience.

Teaching and preaching remain vital gifts within the church (Acts 20:7; 1 Tim. 4:13), but in the New Testament they were woven into a living context of mutual participation. When the meeting becomes dependent upon one man's weekly address, the Body's vitality withers. The recovery of many speaking Christ — each according to measure and grace — restores the freshness, variety, and fullness of divine life in the gathering. Then the church once again becomes not a performance to watch, but a living temple where Christ Himself speaks through His members.

4. The Pastor — From Plural Elders to the One-Man Clergy Role

New Testament Pattern

In the apostolic churches, leadership was always plural and local. Paul and Barnabas "ordained them elders in every church" (Acts 14:23). Titus was instructed to "ordain elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). There is no example in the New Testament of a single man ruling a local church as its permanent, professional head.

Key observations:

• **Plurality**: Each church had multiple elders (also called overseers/bishops, cf. Acts 20:17, 28). There is no mention of a single man ruling the church.
• **Locality**: Elders were raised up in each city — not imported from outside as professional ministers.
• **Function**: Their role was to shepherd, teach, oversee, and be examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1–3), not to be the exclusive ministers of the Word.

Rise of the Monarchical Bishop

By the early second century, a shift had occurred. Ignatius of Antioch (c. AD 110) urged the churches to obey the bishop as the representative of God, with presbyters and deacons under him. This developed into the monarchical episcopacy — one man ruling over a congregation or region.

Over time:
• **The bishop became the primary teacher and ruler**.
• **Presbyters became subordinate**.
• **The clergy/laity divide widened**, with the clergy seen as a spiritual class distinct from ordinary believers.

Medieval Development

By the Middle Ages, the entire structure of the church revolved around a hierarchical system of priests, bishops, archbishops, and finally the pope. The Reformation recovered the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, but in practice most Protestant groups retained the one-man pastorate — replacing the priest with the pastor, but preserving the same basic model.

Spiritual Loss

• **Shared leadership disappeared**: Instead of a team of elders, one man became the center.
• **Body function was hindered**: The saints looked to "the pastor" for ministry rather than realizing they were all members with gifts to exercise.
• **Dependency culture formed**: Growth, vision, and direction became dependent on the personality and ability of one leader.
• **Authoritarian abuse became easier**: Once all spiritual authority was funneled through a single person, control and even spiritual intimidation were inevitable.

Reflection

The New Testament reveals a beautiful pattern: one city, one church, multiple elders. Leadership was pastoral, shepherding, and shared — protecting the flock from authoritarianism and allowing space for the functioning of every member. Recovering this plurality restores balance, accountability, and a fuller expression of Christ as the unique Head.

5. Sunday Morning Attire — From Simplicity to Outward Piety

In the apostolic era, the gatherings of believers were simple, familial, and free from external formality. The saints met in homes, often sharing meals and daily fellowship (Acts 2:46). Nowhere in Scripture do we find the slightest hint that believers were expected to wear special garments for worship. The emphasis was never on outward appearance but on inward reality.

Peter exhorted: "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in

the sight of God of great price." (1 Pet. 3:3–4) The early Christians gathered in the Spirit's presence, not to display refinement or propriety, but to enjoy the Lord and build up one another in love. There was no distinction between the "well-dressed" and the poor—only brothers and sisters meeting in the Lord's name.

As meetings moved from homes into basilicas and formalized worship developed, external appearance began to replace inward condition as the measure of devotion. By degrees, the idea took root that God was "honored" by special clothing.

This distortion arose from several influences:
• **Priestly vestments borrowed from Jewish and pagan ritual**, creating visible classes within the assembly.
• **Social hierarchies of the Greco-Roman and later medieval worlds**, where clothing marked rank and privilege, were imported into church life.
• **Victorian moralism in the 18th and 19th centuries**, which equated respectability and piety with outward propriety—giving birth to the phrase "Sunday best."

Over time, the focus of the gathering subtly shifted:
• **From heart to appearance**: External presentation became a test of reverence.
• **From family to formality**: The Lord's table became a ceremony requiring attire rather than a fellowship of brothers and sisters.
• **From welcome to exclusion**: The poor or laboring believer—the one for whom the Lord had special concern (James 2:1–5)—often felt ashamed or out of place among the well-dressed religious crowd.

The very simplicity that once characterized the gatherings of the saints was lost beneath layers of self-conscious decorum. The church, meant to express heaven's reality on earth, began reflecting the social customs of the world instead.

The results were tragic:
• **False markers of holiness**: Clothing became a substitute for character.
• **Superficial piety**: Outward neatness was mistaken for inward purity.
• **Silent condemnation of the poor**: The assembly ceased to reflect God's impartial heart.

In many places today, believers still labor under the unspoken tyranny of dress codes—anxious about being "presentable" to man, while failing to come boldly before God. Such artificial standards have nothing to do with spiritual worship.

God looks not upon garments but upon hearts (1 Sam. 16:7). The church should be the one place on earth where outward distinctions disappear and all are received as members of one Body. Modesty and cleanliness have value, but they are never the measure of spirituality. When believers gather clothed in humility rather than formality, the Lord's presence is unhindered, and the beauty of His Body is revealed—not in fabric and finery, but in the meek and quiet spirit that is precious in His sight.

6. Ministers of Music — From Mutual Singing to Choir-Led Performance

In the early church, singing was a shared ministry, not a staged performance. Every believer was encouraged to lift their voice in the Spirit, teaching and exhorting one another through songs of Christ. Paul writes: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." (Eph. 5:19) "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs…" (Col. 3:16) Notice the phrase "one another." In the apostolic church, music was an overflow of life, not a performance of art. Singing was the spontaneous response of a heart filled with Christ, a mutual edification among believers—not entertainment for an audience.

Rise of Choirs and Professional Music

As the meetings of believers moved from homes into basilicas and later cathedrals, music became professionalized.

• **In the fourth and fifth centuries**, Rome established the scholae cantorum (choir schools) to train singers for liturgical ceremonies.
• **Through the Middle Ages**, congregational singing was gradually replaced by choirs chanting in Latin—incomprehensible to most worshipers.
• **Even after the Reformation**, when Luther restored congregational hymns, a professionalized structure remained: worship leaders, musicians, and choirs replaced the spontaneous participation of the saints.
The result was that worship became something performed for the people, not expressed by the people.

Shift in Emphasis

• **From participation to performance**: The many ceased to sing; the few sang for them.
• **From Spirit-led to scripted**: Hymns were selected and executed according to program and schedule, not spiritual flow.
• **From Christ-centered to talent-centered**: Skill, presentation, and style often eclipsed the ministry of life.

Music, which should have been the sound of the Body's living fellowship, became the soundtrack of religious ceremony—emotionally stirring, perhaps, but spiritually hollow.

Spiritual Loss

• **The Body's voice was silenced**: What Paul envisioned—"each one teaching and admonishing one another"—was replaced by a single group performing to the rest.
• **Worship became passive**: Believers ceased to function as priests offering spiritual sacrifices, instead becoming spectators of music.
• **The emphasis shifted from life to art**: Melody replaced ministry, and harmony displaced holiness.

Even today, many church services are driven more by the emotional power of music than by the presence of the Spirit. What should lead hearts upward to Christ often becomes a tool for managing crowd response or producing atmosphere.

Reflection

True worship is not performance but participation in life. The New Testament presents music as a ministry of the Body—a chorus of redeemed voices, not a stage of professionals. When every believer is filled with the Spirit and the word of Christ, the entire church becomes a living choir, ministering to the Lord and to one another. The recovery of mutual, Spirit-filled singing restores dignity, vitality, and authenticity to the gathering. When the church sings as one, heaven is heard on earth—not through microphones and rehearsals, but through the life of Christ overflowing from many hearts into one song.

7. Tithing and Clergy Salaries — From Freewill Giving to Institutional Support of a Professional Clergy

New Testament Pattern

In the apostolic church, giving was voluntary, joyful, and led by the Spirit, never imposed by law or institutional obligation. Paul wrote: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 9:7)

Giving was directed by love, not regulation:
• **For the poor**: Offerings were collected to relieve needy saints (Acts 11:29–30; Rom. 15:25–26).
• **For workers**: Those who labored in the Word were supported freely and honorably (1 Tim. 5:17–18).
• **For the Body**: Believers laid their gifts at the apostles' feet for distribution "as any had need" (Acts 4:35).

There is no command in the New Testament that Gentile believers should tithe. Tithing belonged to the Mosaic system, supporting the Levitical priesthood and the temple — a system fulfilled and set aside in Christ (Heb. 7:11–18).

Rise of the Tithe as a Christian Obligation

After the church's union with the state, the clergy sought financial stability. By the late fourth century, leaders began teaching that Christians were required to tithe to support the institutional church.

• **Council of Macon** (AD 585): Enforced tithing as law in parts of Europe.
• **During Medieval Christendom**, the tithe became a civil tax, collected by the state and used to fund the hierarchy — often enriching bishops while the poor remained destitute.
• **Even after the Reformation**, most Protestant churches retained the tithe principle, redirecting it to support salaried pastors and church expenses.

What began as Spirit-led generosity became a religious tax, binding believers under a system Christ had already fulfilled.

Shift in Emphasis

• **From liberty to law**: Giving became a requirement rather than an act of grace.
• **From need to maintenance**: Offerings shifted from helping the poor and supporting gospel work to sustaining buildings, staff, and programs.
• **From equality to hierarchy**: The clergy were maintained by the laity's labor, reinforcing the divide between ministers and members.

This shift turned the house of God into an institution that depends on money for its operation — a far cry from the Spirit-governed church of the New Testament.

The Misuse of Malachi

For centuries, religious leaders have used Malachi 3:8–10 to guilt believers into giving — as though withholding ten percent were robbing God. But Malachi was written to Israel under the old covenant, addressing priests who had defiled the temple and withheld offerings required by the Mosaic law. That law, with its priesthood and tithing system, was fulfilled and set aside in Christ (Heb. 7:18–22). To invoke Malachi today is to drag believers back under a covenant of curse and compulsion that the cross has forever ended. The 'storehouse' was not a church budget but the temple treasury for grain and livestock. To apply this to the Body of Christ — the spiritual house of living stones — is to trade the liberty of the Spirit for the bondage of law.

When modern preachers use Malachi to coerce giving, they speak as those who have forgotten the gospel. They place guilt where grace should reign and turn generosity into taxation. The true motivation for giving is not fear of a curse but love for a Savior.

Spiritual Loss

• **Joy replaced by guilt**: The grace of cheerful giving (2 Cor. 9:7) was buried under pressure and obligation.
• **Faith replaced by finance**: Instead of trusting the Lord for provision, churches built budgets and business plans.
• **Ministry professionalized**: The organic flow of service among the saints was replaced by a salaried clergy class — paid professionals maintaining a religious enterprise.

Reflection

In the New Testament, giving was worship, not taxation. It flowed from the heart of believers moved by grace, not from fear of divine penalty. When giving becomes a law, it ceases to be love. When ministry becomes a profession, it ceases to be life.

The recovery of the Spirit-led, voluntary principle of giving frees believers from guilt and releases resources for genuine kingdom work — meeting needs, advancing the gospel, and supporting laborers who serve in faith. The Lord's work is never sustained by compulsion, but by the overflow of hearts captivated by Christ.

8. Baptism — From Believer's Immersion to Sprinkling and Infant Baptism

New Testament Pattern

In the apostolic age, baptism followed personal faith and was always by immersion in water, portraying burial and resurrection with Christ.

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins…" (Acts 2:38)
"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead… we also should walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:4)

Baptism was not a ritual of religion but a testimony of identification:
• **Timing**: Always after repentance and faith (Acts 8:36–37; Acts 16:31–33).
• **Mode**: Immersion, symbolizing burial and resurrection (Col. 2:12).
• **Meaning**: Union with Christ in His death and new life.
• **Public confession**: A declaration that one had left the old world system and entered into Christ's life and fellowship.

Every believer in the book of Acts was baptized immediately upon believing. There was no class, no delay, and no ceremony — only obedience to Christ.

Rise of Alternative Practices

By the late second and third centuries, two major deviations emerged:

• **Sprinkling or pouring**: Initially permitted only for the sick ("clinical baptism"), it became commonplace in regions where immersion was inconvenient.
• **Infant baptism**: Originating from fear that unbaptized infants might be condemned, it spread rapidly after Augustine's doctrine of original sin (4th–5th centuries), which wrongly taught that baptism itself removed inherited guilt.
• **Baptismal regeneration**: The belief arose that the act itself conveyed saving grace (ex opere operato — "by the work performed"), transforming baptism from a symbol of faith into a mechanical sacrament.

Shift in Emphasis

• **From faith to ritual**: Baptism became a rite performed on those without faith or repentance.
• **From testimony to superstition**: The sign was exalted above the reality it signified.
• **From immersion to convenience**: The vivid picture of death, burial, and resurrection was lost to mere sprinkling.

Spiritual Loss

• **Loss of meaning**: Many were baptized without ever being regenerated.
• **Loss of purity**: The church was filled with unconverted members, diluting its witness.
• **Loss of gospel clarity**: Salvation became associated with ceremony rather than faith in Christ alone.

The result was a church full of the unredeemed — baptized in water but not in Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). This laid the foundation for nominal Christianity and state churches populated by the unsaved.

Clarifying Mark 16:16

Some use the Lord's word, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16) to teach that baptism itself saves. But even in that verse, the emphasis is on believing, not on the act of baptism. Notice the second half: "but he that believeth not shall be damned." It does not say, "he that is not baptized shall be damned." Unbelief condemns; lack of baptism does not.

Baptism is the God-ordained outward confession of an inward faith, but it is not the ground of salvation. Throughout the New Testament, salvation is always by grace through faith in Christ (John 3:16; Eph. 2:8–9; Rom. 10:9–10). Baptism follows faith; it does not replace faith. To make baptism the saving act is to turn the gospel into sacramentalism — exactly what developed in the post-apostolic church.

Reflection

Baptism is not a charm, a rite of passage, or a means of grace. It is a public declaration of an inward reality — that the believer has died with Christ and been raised to walk in newness of life.

Recovering believer's baptism restores the original testimony of separation from the world and union with Christ. It returns the focus to the living Person of the Savior, not the dead ritual of religion.

9. The Lord's Supper — From One Loaf and One Cup to a Ritual Ceremony

In the first century, the Lord's Supper was a living, participatory meal in which believers remembered Christ and expressed their oneness as His Body. Paul wrote: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread." (1 Cor. 10:16–17)

The Supper was simple yet profound:
• **One loaf, one cup**: A visible testimony of the one Body of Christ shared among all believers present.
• **A gathered meal**: Often part of a larger love feast (Acts 2:46; Jude 12), providing time for fellowship and care.

• **Remembrance of the Lord**: The bread and cup proclaimed His death until He comes (1 Cor. 11:26).
• **Self-examination and fellowship**: Believers came in unity, discerning the Body and dealing with offenses before partaking.

By the second and third centuries, this living feast began to shrink into a ceremony. The love feast was separated from the bread and cup to prevent abuse (1 Cor. 11:20–22). The elements came under clerical control, handled only by ordained ministers. Fixed liturgies and prayers transformed a shared meal into a formal rite.

By the Middle Ages, the Supper had evolved into the Mass, viewed as a sacrificial offering that re-presented Christ's death. The laity frequently received only the bread, while the cup was reserved for clergy. The single loaf was replaced by small wafers, fragmenting the picture of the one Body.

The consequences were severe:

• **Oneness obscured**: The vivid sign of one loaf and one cup disappeared, and with it the recognition of the one Body of Christ.

• **Discernment lost**: Paul warned the Corinthians that to partake "**not discerning the Lord's body**" was to bring judgment upon themselves (1 Cor. 11:29). Yet today many believers come to the table divided, indifferent, or unaware of the Body altogether. **The modern church, drugged by tradition and dulled by habit, no longer perceives the oneness for which Christ died.**

• **God's displeasure invited**: In neglecting the corporate reality of the temple—the one Body of Christ—modern Christianity repeats the error Paul condemned in 1 Corinthians 3. Many are building upon the precious foundation of Christ their own wood, hay, and stubble—philosophies, pagan customs, and denominational systems—which will not survive the fire of divine testing.

• **A mockery of the feast**: What was once a full, living meal of remembrance and fellowship has been reduced to a tiny biscuit and a thimble of grape juice—symbols emptied of meaning, administered to spectators rather than shared among a family. Worse still, those partaking are often a mixed multitude, many of whom have never truly been born of God. The so-called pastor himself may not even know which of his attendees are regenerated. What should be a communion of life has become a public ritual of death—an outward show divorced from inward reality.

• **From fellowship to performance**: In some places, attendees must file down aisles to receive the elements from paid professionals and their assistants, as if approaching a sacred counter. The family meal has become a stage act, and the house of God has turned into an auditorium. The clergy stand elevated while the Body stands divided—a perfect picture of man's religion replacing God's revelation.

• **Christ's finality blurred**: The repeated "sacrifice" and mechanical ritual imply an unfinished redemption, contradicting "by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

The Lord's table was never meant to be a staged ceremony but a living testimony of divine oneness—a people redeemed and joined to Christ and to one another in one life, one loaf, and one cup. To "discern the Body" is to see beyond the symbols and into the reality: Christ the Head and His members sharing one fellowship, one life, and one purpose. Recovering this reality will restore the Lord's table from spectacle to substance—from ritual to reality—until His presence fills His people again as the living bread from heaven.

10. Christian Education — From House-to-House Teaching to Institutional Systems

New Testament Pattern

Teaching and discipleship in the apostolic era were organic, relational, and centered on Christ Himself — not academic or programmatic.

"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." (Acts 5:42)
"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:11–12)

Key observations:
• **House-to-house fellowship**: Teaching flowed through daily life and gathered homes, not through a pulpit-to-pew hierarchy.
• **Christ-centered content**: The subject of all teaching was "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." (1 Cor. 2:2)
• **Goal of equipping**: The aim was to enable every saint to minister, speak, and build up others — not to create passive learners.
• **Mutual function**: Every believer was expected to teach, admonish, and encourage one another (Col. 3:16; Heb. 3:13).

In the early church, education meant transformation — learning Christ by living Christ.

Rise of Institutional Education

As the church departed from her spiritual simplicity, education became centralized and professionalized.

• **2nd–3rd centuries**: The catechetical schools of Alexandria and Antioch began training select men in theology and Greek philosophy, merging revelation with speculation.

• **4th–10th centuries**: Monastic schools preserved Scripture but confined learning to monks and clergy, cutting off the common believer from the Word.
• **Post-Reformation era**: Seminaries and universities arose to train ministers, often emphasizing intellectual mastery of doctrine rather than spiritual experience of Christ.

In later centuries, "Sunday School" emerged — originally as a means of teaching literacy to poor children (Robert Raikes, 18th century). Though noble in motive, it soon became the primary form of "Christian education," dividing the church by age groups and turning learning into a weekly classroom rather than a daily life of fellowship and truth.

Shift in Emphasis

• **From relational to institutional**: Teaching moved from the family and the fellowship of believers to the classroom.
• **From equipping to entertaining**: The goal shifted from forming mature disciples to holding attention.
• **From participation to professionalism**: Only "trained" teachers were deemed capable of ministering the Word.
• **From truth to tradition**: The Word of God was filtered through denominational curricula rather than direct experience of Christ.

The result was a system where the living ministry of the Spirit was replaced by lessons, outlines, and tests — producing students of religion rather than lovers of the Lord.

Spiritual Loss

• **Loss of vitality**: Teaching became information, not revelation.
• **Loss of family fellowship**: Homes ceased to be centers of life and light.
• **Loss of priesthood function**: The saints, instead of teaching one another, became consumers of pre-packaged "Christian education."
• **Loss of the Word's power**: The Scriptures became a subject to be studied rather than a Person to be known (John 5:39–40).

In place of the living ministry of life, we now have religious instruction — more orderly perhaps, but void of divine vitality. The tragedy is that most of Christendom's children grow up in church programs but outside the reality of Christ.

Reflection

True Christian education is not academic — it is life imparting life. It begins at home, continues in fellowship, and culminates in the corporate building up of the Body.

When every believer learns Christ directly from the Spirit and shares Him with others, the church becomes a living school of divine life — "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Col. 3:16).

The recovery of house-to-house teaching restores what the institutional church has buried — the simplicity, vitality, and mutuality of truth in daily fellowship.

11. Pagan Holidays — From Weekly Remembrance to Christianized Festivals

New Testament Pattern

In the first century, believers remembered the Lord weekly, not annually, through the breaking of bread and the cup of blessing.

"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread…" (Acts 20:7).
Their focus was not on ritual or calendar, but on Christ Himself — His death, resurrection, and living presence among them. The only recurring observance ordained by Christ was the Lord's Supper, not yearly feasts or religious seasons.

The rhythm of the early church was simple: daily fellowship, weekly remembrance, continual worship (Acts 2:46–47). There were no "holy days," because every day was the Lord's (Rom. 14:5–6; Col. 2:16–17).

Adoption of Pagan Festivals

When Christianity became the favored religion of the Roman Empire, pagan customs were absorbed to make the new faith more acceptable to the masses.

• **Saturnalia → Christmas**: The Roman winter festival of feasting and gift-giving (late December) was relabeled to honor Christ's birth. December 25 — long celebrated as the birthday of Sol Invictus ("the Unconquered Sun") — was chosen to merge sun worship with the nativity.
• **Fertility Festivals → Easter**: The spring rites of fertility and renewal (with symbols like eggs and rabbits) were rebranded to celebrate the resurrection. The name "Easter" itself is derived from Eostre, a pagan goddess of spring.
• **Saints' Days**: The birthdays or martyrdom anniversaries of saints were canonized as annual holy days, creating a new liturgical calendar patterned after the pagan feast cycle.

These "Christianized" holidays gave the church cultural respectability — but at the cost of truth, purity, and simplicity.

Shift in Emphasis

• **From weekly remembrance to annual observance**: The living remembrance of the Lord's death at His table was replaced by calendar-based ceremonies.
• **From spiritual to seasonal**: Christ's eternal reality was tied to earthly dates and customs.
• **From simplicity to spectacle**: Festivals became opportunities for display, pageantry, and religious performance.
• **From separation to syncretism**: Pagan practices were baptized and rebranded as Christian traditions.

The apostolic pattern of "Christ our Passover" (1 Cor. 5:7–8) — a continual, inward celebration — was traded for external festivities and sentimental holidays.

Spiritual Loss

• **Loss of focus**: The weekly remembrance of the Lord's death was eclipsed by seasonal events and cultural nostalgia.
• **Loss of discernment**: Many celebrate Christ's "birth" amid pagan symbols of fertility and the sun god, unaware of their origins.
• **Loss of reality**: Observance replaced experience. The church calendar became a substitute for the living Christ.
• **Loss of testimony**: Instead of standing apart from the world, the church joined the world's revelry in religious disguise.

The tragedy is not merely historical — it continues today. Most Christians will defend Christmas and Easter more passionately than they will defend the Lord's table or the oneness of the Body of Christ. The counterfeit has been so long embraced that few remember there was ever a genuine pattern to recover.

Reflection

The early believers did not need "Christian holidays" to celebrate Christ — He was their life every day. They knew no "holy seasons" because every day was sanctified by His presence.

To recover the apostolic pattern is not to reject joy or remembrance, but to return to the living reality: Christ remembered weekly at His table, worshiped daily in fellowship, and celebrated continually in Spirit and truth.

Let the church once more cast off the trappings of pagan religion and recover the pure devotion of the Bride — loving the Lord in simplicity, not seasonally, and proclaiming His death until He comes.

Conclusion — The Recovery of the Local Churches

The practices described in these pages — buildings as temples, services as performances, sermons as monologues, pastors as clergy, attire as piety, music as entertainment, tithing as taxation, baptism as ritual, the Lord's Supper as ceremony, education as institutionalism, and holidays as Christianized paganism — all share a single root: the loss of the revelation of Christ and the church.

The New Testament shows us a completely different pattern:

• **The church is the living Body of Christ**, not a religious system (Eph. 1:22–23).
• **The believers themselves are the temple of God**, not any physical building (1 Cor. 3:16–17).

• **The gatherings are mutual and Spirit-led**, not stage-managed events (1 Cor. 14:26).
• **Leadership is plural**, **local, and pastoral**, not hierarchical or professional (Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:1–3).
• **Giving is voluntary and Spirit-directed**, not compelled by guilt (2 Cor. 9:7).
• **Baptism and the Lord's table are living testimonies**, not religious sacraments (Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 10:16–17).
• **The church life is daily, house to house**, not confined to one hour on Sunday (Acts 2:46–47).

When the church departed from this pattern, she ceased to be the living expression of Christ and became instead a religious institution — gilded with Scripture, but hollow at the core.

A Call to Recover God's Pattern

The recovery God desires today is not a new denomination or movement. It is the recovery of Christ Himself as Head, and the church as His Body expressed locally. Paul wrote "to the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2), not "to the churches of different kinds in Corinth." John was told to write "to the seven churches which are in Asia" (Rev. 1:11), not to religious systems but to lampstands — local testimonies of one universal Body.

This divine pattern safeguards oneness and preserves purity. When believers in each city gather simply as the church in that city, under Christ as the only Head, they give the Lord the ground to recover His testimony on earth.

The Present Reality

Most of what passes for Christianity today is post-apostolic tradition encrusted with centuries of human invention. It is a Christianity of convenience — ornate, busy, respectable — yet often powerless and divided. But amid the ruin, the Lord still calls: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Rev. 2:7)

Those who hear will answer His call — to leave the corruption of organized religion, to return to the simplicity of Christ, and to gather on the ground of oneness with all who are His in a given place.

Final Word

The issue of this recovery is not merely reform, but testimony — that through the local churches, the world may again see the reality of John 17:21: "That they all may be one… that the world may believe."

To recover the local churches is to recover the Lord's way, the apostles' teaching, and the divine pattern lost through centuries of tradition. It is to bring the church back to what she was in the beginning — a living expression of Christ on the earth.

May every believer who reads these words be stirred to return — not to tradition, not to nostalgia, but to the Word of God and the living Christ Himself.